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OUR PREPARATIONS FOR THE WAR OF 1846-8

BY

JUSTIN H. SMITH

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OUR PREPARATIONS FOR THE WAR OF 1846-8

JUSTIN H. SMITH

It is certainly a grand sight when a nation of freemen, leaving the plow and the pruning-hook at their country's call, go forth to fight her battles; and this has always been a favorite picture with our orators. If a possibility of war darkened the horizon, if a foreign nation required a warning, if the destiny of our flag appeared to suggest some especially high emprise, they have pointed with lofty pride at the wall of brave men behind our seaports and the teeming millions of the Mississippi Valley. So they did, for example, when the difficulties with Mexico that led to the War of 1846-8 became acute, and it may not be amiss to observe just how brilliantly all expectations were realized. The problem, to be sure, was comparatively simple. We were not precisely at the bow-and-arrow stage, but almost literally the flintlock-on-the-wall period still continued. Mostly our field guns threw six-pound shot. Our armies were comparatively mere squads. The exhibition cannot therefore be as telling as it could be made today, of course; but it is worth while, none the less, to pass it briefly in review.

Although Mexico had been threatening hostilities for years and Taylor's army of less than 3,000 regulars had been thrown forward to the Rio Grande in March, 1846, the outbreak of the war took us by surprise. On Saturday, the 9th of May, the news that an attack had been made upon Capt. Thornton's reconnoitering party arrived at Washington; Monday a Message from Polk announced that a state of war existed; and two days later an Act of Congress, recognizing that situation, received the signature of the President. The Act empowered him to use in the prosecution of hostilities the army, the navy, the militia and not more than 50,000 volunteers,—to serve twelve months after reaching the rendezvous “or to the end of the war, unless sooner discharged,”—to expend not more than \$10,000,000, to complete the vessels of war already

authorized, and to purchase additional vessels. By other Acts the President was authorized (May 13) to increase by enlistment the number of privates in the regular army from 64 to not over 100 per company, thus bringing the rank and file up to 15,540; a company of sappers, miners and pontoniers and a regiment of mounted riflemen, originally intended to protect emigrants and traders on the Oregon route, were created (May 15 and 19); and details concerning organization were fixed or entrusted to the Executive (June 18 and 26). Under the last head authority was given to appoint all the necessary general officers.¹

"The war sense of the United States," it has been remarked, "seems to be in inverse ratio to its war spirit,"² and as a whole the military measures of the government exhibited more zeal than discretion. In particular they put in action the very system that had proved disastrous a generation before. For this Taylor was primarily responsible, for after having seen the War of 1812 and that of Florida languish and crawl, he strongly urged that volunteers be called out for one year of service.³ Polk's message deepened the mischief by expressing confidence in raw troops,⁴ although in 1838 the Secretary of War had assured him that the difference in expense between volunteers and regulars was "at least as four to one" besides the waste resulting from their total ignorance of administration, the cost of marching to and from distant points for short periods of service and the disproportionate increase in the pension list.⁵ The number of regular privates was

¹ References for this paragraph: Polk, Diary, May 9, 11. U. S. Statutes at Large, ix, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 20. Emory Upton, *Military Policy of the U. S.*, 204. J. D. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, iv, 603. The dates of bills passed are those of approval. The action of Congress was promulgated by the Adjutant General in General Orders Nos. 14, 18, 21, 34.

² *Journal U. S. Cavalry Assoc.*, 1896, p. 175.

³ House Ex. Doc. 60; 30 Cong., 1 sess., 141.

⁴ Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, iv, 443.

⁵ R. Johnson in Senate, Jan. 11, 1848 (*Washington Union*, Jan. 12). See also Emory Upton, *Mil. Pol.*, 195, 202; *National Intelligencer*, Nov. 7; *Welles Mss., Library of Congress. "Germanicus" stated in the *New York Commercial Advertiser* that in the Florida War the ratio of expense between regulars and militia was 1 to 6; of efficiency, 1 to 0 (*Nat. Intell.*, Nov. 7). Of course the volunteers, who wished and expected to fight, were better than militia, who wished and expected to remain at home. Had the regular

indeed increased but not the roll of officers, and enlistment was not stimulated, as probably it might have been, by adding something to the pay. Having a choice between a definite and an indefinite period the volunteers were sure, as the Secretary of War foresaw,⁶ to elect the former, although a sufficient number would almost certainly have engaged for the war, had that been the only proposal. So the sequel appeared to prove, and there were antecedent reasons for expecting as much. The Mexicans were commonly regarded as cowardly and inefficient; very few Americans expected them to hold out as long as they did; and intending volunteers would naturally have counted upon returning soon. The enthusiasm natural at the opening of a war and a deep interest resulting from the supposed peril of Taylor's army worked in the same direction. Yet our government chose to accept gratuitously the risk—which in due time became a certainty—of embarrassing itself, disappointing the country and encouraging the enemy by offering a brief term of service.

Instead of retaining control of the organization and officering of the regiments, it entrusted this work to the States, and as a rule the men chose their own officers;⁷ but in these features of the system, as in our governmental methods generally, there was some advantage as well as much loss. Daniel Webster, for example, held that volunteers ought to have the right of electing for leaders men whom they knew and could trust⁸; and if they preferred to sicken and bleed under captains as ignorant as themselves—whom they knew and could trust—rather than fare differently under trained officers whom they would have had to obey without fully understanding them, they were perhaps entitled to the privilege, and no

army been increased to 50,000 privates (giving 30,000 in the field), there would no doubt have been a great saving of time, blood and treasure (I. I. Stevens, *Campaigns of the Rio Grande and of Mexico*, 14). (In these notes the year is not attached to a document when it was 1846. Manuscript documents are indicated by an asterisk.)

⁶ *To Gov. Wright, June 3: War Dept., Military Book. *Circular Letter, May 19: *ibid*.

⁷ Many, if not most, of the volunteer regiments were in fact, owing to the appreciation of a West Point education shown by some of the States, commanded by trained men (W. S. Henry, *Campaign Sketches*, 127).

⁸ Webster, *Letters* (Van Tyne, ed.), 346.

doubt they learned something from exercising it. Anyhow, said Webster, the other method would have been degrading. As for generals, the law of the 18th of June compelled the Executive to take them from the militia, although they would be under no obligation to serve more than three months, and might withdraw in the midst of a campaign.⁹ There was no provision for filling vacancies resulting from death or discharge;¹⁰ and, finally, the appropriations were so poorly arranged that the quartermaster's office had to juggle with funds as even Polk himself could not lawfully have done.¹¹

Such as it was, the system went promptly into effect. Beginning on the 15th of May, the Secretary of War sent requisitions for volunteers to the governors of States, deeming this method of application advantageous as well as due to their official position, since they were supposed to know the troops of their jurisdiction and the best places from which to draw them. In general the plan was to apportion about 25,000 men to the northeastern States, to be enrolled and await orders, and to call out nearly as many from the other States for immediate service. The former were all to be infantry; the latter, horse and foot in the ratio of about one to three. It was expected that existing militia organizations—regiments or parts of regiments—would offer their services, and that new men would fill the ranks as they felt moved to come forward. Not only privates but officers were to approach the national service by that portal, and then be mustered into the army at the appointed State rendezvous by a United States officer detailed for the purpose. In four days the calls were substantially all on their way.¹² The purpose of distributing

⁹ Washington *Union*, June 25. Polk, *Diary*, June 20, 22. Allen Johnson, Douglas, 114.

¹⁰ Richardson, *Messages*, iv, 515.

¹¹ House Ex. Doc. 60; 30 Cong., 1 sess., 554 (Jesup).

¹² Owing doubtless to haste and changes of mind the various memoranda, orders, letters and reports do not perfectly tally; hence the statement in the text is somewhat indefinite. The volunteers summoned for immediate service were deemed enough for the Mexican War. The others were called for in view of a possible conflict with England (*Marcy to Oliver, July 9: War Dept., Military Book). Polk had promised Benton to call out as few men as possible, and the magnitude of the Mexican problem was not understood. In a War Dept. memorandum of May 18 the regiments to take the field were given as follows (the rendezvous in parentheses): Ark., one of horse

requisitions over the whole country was to interest every State, Polk explained; and to stimulate the executive officials¹³ he urged upon Marcy, Secretary of War, the most prompt and energetic action and personal attention to each detail, insisting for his own part upon being kept "constantly advised of every important step that was taken."

In almost all quarters except New England, where the annexation of Texas could not yet be forgiven, the war spirit rose high, and astonished the most sanguine. At New York the walls were covered with placards headed, "Ho, for the halls of the Montezumas." At Philadelphia 20,000 citizens of all parties gathered "to sustain the country." In the central States banks advanced money without security; farmers' wives issued free rations; ladies made clothing and flags by the wholesale; roads turned black with men. St. Louis began to drill on the 12th of May, and in a few days the excitement was so deep and universal that the courts adjourned. North Carolina offered more than three times her quota. In the Gulf States it was feared that not enough

(Washington on Red River), one-half of foot (Ft. Smith); Miss., one foot (Vicksburg); Ala., one foot (Mobile); Ga., one foot (Columbus); Tenn., one horse (Memphis), two foot (Nashville); Ky., one horse and one foot (Louisville), one foot (Newport) and apparently one independent company; Mo., one horse (Ft. Leavenworth for Santa Fe), two and one-half foot (St. Louis [but there is an uncertainty about these regiments]); Ill., three foot, also called four foot without change in the number of men (Alton); Ind., three foot (some point on the Ohio River); Ohio, three foot (Cinn.); Texas, one horse and one-half foot (Austin); Fla., two tenths [foot] (Pensacola); Dist. of Col., six-tenths [foot] (Washington); Wis., one-tenth [foot] (Ft. Crawford); Ia., one-tenth [foot] (Ft. Atkinson). A regiment was reckoned as 904 footmen or 915 horsemen. The troops to await orders were seven regiments in N. Y., six in Pa., three in Va., two in Md., two in La., one each in Me., Mass., N. J., N. C., S. C., Mich, Wis., Ia.; one half-regiment (battalion, i.e., five companies) each in N. H., R. I., Conn., Vt., Dela., Fla., Ala. The number of privates in a company was made 64, and the rank and file were to be men "apparently" between 18 and 45 years of age inclusive, and physically strong and vigorous (*Circular Letter, May 19, War. Dept., Milit. Book). The method of electing field officers varied. July 2 the Second Infantry (regulars) was ordered, except Co. C, to Point Isabel, but was not full enough to set out until September (House Ex. Doc. 60; 30, 1, 469).

¹³ The executive staff of the War Dept. consisted of Bvt. Brig. Gen. R. Jones, Adj. Gen.; Lieut. Col. George Talcott, head of the Ordnance Bureau; Maj. Gen. T. S. Jesup, Quartermaster Gen.; Brig. Gen. N. Towson, Paymaster Gen.; Dr. T. Lawson, Surgeon Gen.; Bvt. Brig. Gen. G. Gibson, Commissary Gen. of Subsistence; Col. J. G. Totten, Chief Engineer; Col. J. J. Abert, Chief Topog. Engineer (House Ex. Doc. 143; 29 Cong., 1 sess.; House Ex. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 547).

citizens would remain at home to police the negroes, and at New Orleans the roar of business was almost drowned by the still more clamorous roar of the drums.

In preparing the regiments for service many complications arose. The volunteers themselves, as a rule, did not know what they needed or even what they wished. Regarding all military affairs they were ignorant and helpless. Such officers as understood the business were obliged to work almost day and night. Everything had to be provided; many of the things had to be made; and the men were usually ahead of the supplies. But as rapidly and well as possible Brigadier General Wool and other officers got the regiments into the service; and, leaving the rendezvous and the crowd of praying, cheering people, the volunteers set out bravely for the war, journeyed to the points of embarkation and eventually reached Brazos Island off Point Isabel. Meanwhile Brevet Major General Gaines, commanding the Military Department of the West, began on the 3rd of May at his own instance to requisition troops for the relief of Taylor, and a considerable number of these men also proceeded to the front.¹⁴

¹⁴ References covering this and the two preceding paragraphs,—i.e., the raising and forwarding of volunteers. *Marcy to Giles, May 19: Sec. War files. *Correspondence with Governors, May 15-19: War Dept., Military Book; files of Sec. War and Adj. Gen. *Marcy to Govs., Ala., etc., June 5: Military Book. *Marcy to Wright, June 3: *ibid.* Gen. Ords., No. 15, Washington, May 29. Senate Ex. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 2 sess. (Marcy, Report). *War Dept. Memorandum, May 18. *Niles' Register*, May 30, 196. Polk, Diary, May 16, 19; June 23-4; Sept. 22, 24. Trans. Ills. State Hist. Soc., 1904, 283; 1905, 194; 1906, 174-5. Charles Lyell, Second Visit, ii, 343-345. W. B. to D. C. Campbell, Nov. 9: *Tenn. Hist. Mag.*, June, 1915. Prickett in *Madison Record*, 1850. Milton Jamieson, Campaign in Mexico, 73, 78. Phila. *Public Ledger*, May 18. Quitman in *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 sess., 970. *Welles Mss.: Library of Cong. Cameron in *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 826. *L'Honniedieu to Chase, May 20: Chase papers, Library of Cong. Washington *Union*, May 27; June 12. Ohio Arch. and Hist. Qtrly., 1912, 280. Ills. State Hist. Lib., Trans., ix, 38, and 1911, civ-cix. Arkansas Hist. Commission, Bulletin No. 6, 181. Oran Perry, Indiana in the Mexican War, 4-13, 17, 83. Isaac Smith, Reminiscences, 5 St. Louis Weekly *Reveille*, May 10. T. J. McCormack, Koerner, i, 495-7. Lew Wallace, Autobiog., 114. G. T. M. Davis, Autobiog., 94-5. Iowa Adj. Gen., Roster, vi, 788-9. A. C. Quisenberry, Taylor, 22. *A. Heiman, Services of First Tenn. Regt.: Tenn. Hist. Soc., Memphis *Eagle*, May 15. *Niles' Register*, May 30, 196; June 12, 227; July 4, 288; July 18, 313. *Gov. Graham of North Carolina, Message, Nov. 17: Gov's. Letter Book. *Fair to Martin, June 4: Alabama Archives. *Martin to Marcy, May 31; *ibid.* Placard, May 7: (printed) *ibid.* *Brown to Duffield, May 11: Mississippi Exec.

The question of a commander had now to be decided. Polk felt little confidence in Taylor. The General's separating his army so far from his base and exposing both parts to imminent peril seemed inexcusable; and furthermore Major General Winfield Scott, the hero of Lundy's Lane, who stood at the head of the army, was clearly the logical chief of the large forces now called out. Certain facts counted, however, against that officer. He was almost sixty years old, and many thought him, as did Senator Fairfield, "too much of an old granny." In 1839 he had been given fifty-seven votes at the Whig presidential convention, and of late the brilliancy of his political anticipations had made him look "ten feet high," said Corwin. His want of reverence for a recent decision of the President respecting brevet rank had led Polk and Benton to think of banishing him to a post on the northern frontier.

Journal. *Id. to Marcy, June 3: *ibid.* J. F. H. Claiborne, Quitman, i, 223-4, 228. *Marcy to Brown, June 16: War Dept., Milit. Book. *Cooke to Holt, May 17: Holt papers, Library of Cong. *H. H. Barbour, Diary: in Mrs. Barbour's hands. W. W. Bishop, Journal. [Robertson], Remin, of a Campaign in Mexico, 11, 17, 23. *Tennery, Diary: belonging to Rev. John S. Cook, D. D. Houston, Texas, i, 68, 126-7, 138. Oswandel, Notes, 31. *J. C. Ewing, Diary. French, Two Wars, 33. In La. there was little enthusiasm at first because it was felt that the government had not treated fairly those who volunteered in 1845 (New Orleans *Tropic*, May 5; *Bullock, May 8: War Dept., Adj. Gen's. files; Gaines to Marcy, May 8: Sen. Ex. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 52; New York *Herald*, June 20). In Ga. the war was opposed in a manner described by a Democrat as "loathsome" (Lamar to Cobb, June 8, 24: Am. Hist. Assoc. Report, 1911, vol. 2). For some reason there was little zeal in Texas (Meade, Letters, i, 93; New Orleans *Picayune*, May 12; *Nat. Intelligencer*, May 11). Gen. Orders No. 15, Washington, May 29, has reference to the mustering of the volunteers and their lines of march. Some of the horse (Ky., Tenn. and Ark.) were to go to San Antonio, Texas, for an expedition against Chihuahua, but most of the troops were ordered to embark at New Orleans or Mobile for Pt. Isabel. *Letters from Wool, who had previously been in command of the Eastern Dept., with headquarters at Troy, N. Y., may be found as follows: June 7, 12, 18, 24 in the Adj. Gen's. files, Washington; June 5, 7, 10, 13, 25 and July 16, with a reply from the War Department, June 16, in the Marcy papers, Library of Congress. Two Tenn. regiments were able to move south about June 1, but it was not until about July 23 that the last Ills. regiments advanced in that direction. Genls. Butler, Marshall, Quitman, Pillow and Shields left New Orleans for Brazos Id. on the steamer "New York", and arrived Aug. 4 (Claiborne, Quitman, i, 239). Gaines's proceedings led to great expense, and embarrassed the government very much. He kept on even after he knew of Taylor's victories, and the total number called out by him perhaps exceeded 12,000. The best information on this subject is given in the *record of the court that tried him (War Dept., Judge Advocate General's office) and in Gen. Orders No. 39, Washington, Aug. 20, which presents the facts, the conclusions of the court and the remarks of the President thereon.

General Gaines and his many friends hated him, and Mrs. Gaines insisted that no one was "much" whose mouth could be covered with a button. Finally he was called vain, and so he often appeared to be.

Distrusting Taylor, however, and deeply alarmed about the situation on the frontier, Polk sent for Scott on the 13th of May and conferred upon him verbally the chief command; yet, while admitting that he saw proofs of experience in the General's remarks, he pronounced him too "scientific and visionary," as the master of a difficult business must always appear to the tyro.¹⁵ Probably he knew that a man could not become a soldier over night, as he could become a militia colonel or a "statesman;" but he expected no serious trouble with Mexico, and believed that even an improvised army would make "a brisk and a short war of it," as the administration paper neatly said. The only things required were to march now and triumph tomorrow.

Scott, however, felt that waging war might involve military operations. He undertook to prove by elaborate calculations that the greater part of the volunteers could not, at the best, arrive on the Rio Grande before the first week in August; and, since that would be the rainy season, when the hoofs of mules and horses would be too soft for use and various other difficulties would arise, he recommended that most of the new troops, after remaining under instruction at salubrious points in the United States during the summer, should be placed upon that river by the 25th of September, so as to make with the volunteers and regulars already there 25,000 or possibly 30,000 healthy, properly equipped and more or less trained soldiers, ready to invade Mexico in a decisive manner. On the 15th of May he gave the chiefs of the general staff directions about throwing supplies of all kinds upon the various rendezvous in advance of the volunteers, and even called attention to the necessity of promptly obtaining light

¹⁵ Polk's principal interview with Scott occurred on May 14. The President did not at that time believe that 20,000 volunteers would be needed for the war with Mexico (Diary, May 14).

boats for the navigation of the Rio Grande.¹⁶ He felt, however, particularly after news of what he called Taylor's "great and brilliant victories" arrived, that it would not seem proper—especially to military men—for him to supersede that officer except with heavy reinforcements; and no doubt he thought it would scarcely enhance a prestige that was not only dear to him personally but invaluable to him as the commander of the American forces, to lie idle in hot mud for several months. He therefore proposed to leave Washington about the 30th of May, give his personal attention to the troops and supplies *en route* and at the rendezvous, and reach the scene of action a little before them.

Such procrastination disgusted Polk, and such "schemes" annoyed Marcy, both of whom doubtless had an eye on political considerations. Democratic Congressmen protested that Scott was too slow and that, if successful in Mexico, he would be the ruin of the Democratic party.¹⁷ In short, it was necessary to get rid of him. On the 19th of May, therefore, without saying a word to Scott, Marcy had a provision attached to the bill which finally became the law of the 18th of June, enabling the Executive to appoint an officer new to the army as commander-in-chief of the volunteers, and at the end of the war eliminate Scott entirely. This led to sharp language between the two men. Moreover Marcy intimated that the militia, who had gone to Taylor's assistance and were to serve only three months, must have a chance to distinguish themselves; and Scott declined to take the field if liable to be fired on from the rear. At this juncture, too, a personal note of his—to the effect that no Eastern man, Whig or West Pointer, was likely to be given a commission—turned up at the White House.

¹⁶ Scott's information about the region was derived from Anthony Butler, formerly U. S. Minister to Mexico, and General I. T. Mason (Scott to Marcy, May 25: Sen. Ex. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess, 10), both of whom had been on the ground, and it led him to think the inactive season somewhat longer than it really was. Doubtless he would soon have ascertained the truth.

¹⁷ One should not be in haste to condemn the administration and the Democratic politicians for desiring to eliminate Scott, for ours is a party system and he was in politics. He should have realized that as head of the army he was bound to serve the country as a whole, and should have refrained from seeking party honors that evidently might (as they now did) interfere with the fulfillment of that prime duty.

Polk regarded this note as disrespectful, and thought the expression "fire upon my rear" was aimed at the Executive. Scott protested that his words referred to Marcy and members of Congress, and did all that he could, without sacrificing his professional convictions, to satisfy the President; but his efforts were in vain. The battles of Palo Alto and Resaca had now been fought; the army on the Rio Grande was out of danger; Taylor seemed not so utterly incompetent after all; and hence, on the 25th of May, Scott was ordered to remain at Washington.¹⁸

This decision left General Taylor in command,¹⁹ but he was far from happy. Possibly he realized that many, if not most, of his ablest officers considered him unfit for his position. Scott ought to come, he insisted over and over again in private letters; the campaign would be a failure, and the officer conducting it would be ruined. He distrusted the intentions of the administration, and he condemned its policy. As early as the 9th of May he feared too many volunteers—whom he disliked—were coming; by the 20th he knew what Gaines had done; and Scott's letter of the 18th of May informed him that some 20,000 such troops were to "march upon Mexico."²⁰

¹⁸ The question of a general in chief: *Fairfield to wife, Apr. 14: Fairfield papers, Library of Cong. Stanwood, Presidency, 195. *Pakenham, No. 74, June 13: Foreign Office papers, Public Record Office, London. *Peters to McLean, June 26: McLean papers, Library of Cong. Gaines, Sept. 10, 1845: Sen. Ex. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 38. Mrs. Chapman Coleman, Crittenden, i, 243-4. *Southern Advocate*, Apr. 3. Gaines, June 7: Sen. Ex. Doc. 402, 29 Cong., 1 sess. Polk, Diary, Mar. 28; May 13, 14, 19, 21-3, 25-26, 1846; Apr. 1, 1847. Marcy to Polk, June 8: Sen. Ex. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 2. Polk to Senate, June 8: Richardson, Messages, 448. *Washington Union*, May 18. Scott-Marcy correspondence: Sen. Ex. Doc. 378; 29 Cong., 1 sess., 4-18. *Scott, Memoranda for Gen. Staff: Sec. War files. *Niles' Register*, June 6, 214. *National Intelligencer*, Aug. 29. Grant, Memoirs, i, 119. New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin*, June 18. W. M. Watson, In Memoriam, 121. *Boston Atlas*, June 12. New York *Herald*, June 13. *Welles Mss.: Library of Cong. New Orleans *Picayune*, June 17. *Reed to McLean, Oct. 26: McLean papers, Library of Cong. *Boston Courier*, June 15. W. B. to D. C. Campbell, July 3: *Tenn. Hist. Mag.*, June, 1915. *Marcy to Wetmore, Apr. 22, 1847: Marcy papers, Library of Cong.

¹⁹ May 30 Taylor was brevetted major general and assigned to duty with that rank (House Ex. Doc. 19, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 119).

²⁰ For this paragraph: *Worth to Capt. S., Jan. 1; Mar. 4: belonging to Mrs. K. S. Hubbell. W. B. to D. C. Campbell, July 3; Aug. 9: *Tenn. Hist. Mag.*, June, 1915. Taylor to daughter, June 9: *Autograph*, July-Aug., 1912.

Under this head all his fears were realized. First three-months men (militia) sent for by himself in April, then six-months men called out by Gaines and then twelve-months men raised under the war bill poured in. By the 3rd of June his army had risen to nearly 8,000. Three weeks later the First Tennessee Infantry—advance guard of the Congressional troops—appeared, and it found on the scene six regiments from Louisiana, one from St. Louis, one from Kentucky, seven companies from Alabama and twelve or fifteen from Texas. All of these had come in response to calls of Taylor or Gaines; and some had been on the ground more than a month. In all about 8,000 of these two classes arrived, and in accordance with Taylor's desire nearly all of them—except a very few, who agreed to serve twelve months—were sent home about the 1st of August.²¹ Before they took their leave, at least 20,000 American soldiers were on the Rio Grande, besides an inevitable number of American civilians more or less directly connected with the army or not connected at all; and by far the greater part of their subsistence had to come, of course, from the States.²²

National Intelligencer, Sept. 16, 1848. *Larnard to Hitchcock, June 13: Hitchcock papers, Library of Cong. Taylor to Wood, May 9; June 3, 12, 21, 24, 30; July 25: W. K. Bixby's Taylor letters. Id. to Butler, July 1: P. F. Madigan, Catalogue No. 2, 1914. (Disliked) G. G. Meade, Letters, i, 103. Scott, May 18: Sen. Ex. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 17 (see Taylor to Wood, June 12). By May 28 U. S. newspapers stating that 30,000 volunteers were coming reached the Rio Grande (Meade, Letters, i, 95).

²¹ The laws recognized only the regulars, the militia (who could be required to serve but three months) and the new twelve-months men. The six-months volunteers, therefore, had to join another of the classes or be discharged. One must be extremely careful here about making definite assertions regarding dates and numbers. Affairs were in such confusion that even headquarters would seem to have been, to a considerable extent, in the dark. Marcy, June 8, did not know how many troops Taylor had (House Ex. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 323) and the statements that one finds are always wanting in precision or completeness. Scott (House Ex. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 325) supposed that Taylor would receive about 16,280 twelve-months volunteers and enough recruits for the regular regiments to make his aggregate about 23,070 besides the three-months and six-months men who would engage for a longer term. By July 30 substantially all the twelve-months foot intended for Taylor except those from Illinois and Missouri had arrived (House Ex. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 401).

²² References for this paragraph: Meade, Letters, i, 114-5. *Bliss to Hitchcock, June 7: Hitchcock papers, Library of Cong. [Robertson], *Reminiscences of a Campaign*, June 24. W. B. to D. C. Campbell, July 3: *Tenn. Hist. Mag.*, June, 1915. J. Davis in U. S. Senate, Aug. 5, 1850. Taylor,

The men were placed in a series of camps. The best of all these was probably at Point Isabel, now the summer resort of Brownsville and Matamoros, where the dry, undulating ground and fresh breezes made for health and comfort. The shallowness of the harbor impaired the convenience of Point Isabel somewhat, however, and the primary camp was three or four miles away at the north end of Brazos Island, which consisted of low hills on the side toward the mainland, a swamp in the centre, a wreck-strewn beach on the outer side, and in general three blades of grass to fifty square feet of sand, as Lieut. G. B. McClellan wrote home. Here, too, the air was excellent, but the brackish water caused much complaint, and the sand blew into everything,—hair, nose, eyes and food. Marching the length of the island the soldiers found themselves, at its southern end, about eighty yards from the mainland, waded across the bayou or strait known as Boca Chica, and after marching about seven miles farther came to another camp and group of storehouses, ten miles or so from their point of departure, called Mouth of the Rio Grande, where the river steamers tied up or anchored.²³ Here, as at Camp Brazos, the ground was “working alive with magotes and land crabs,” as a soldier put it; but the salt breezes usually tempered the heat. Eight miles from the gulf by land—twenty-five or thirty by water—one came to Burrita, a cluster of huts on a ridge close to the stream, and this high ground became the site of a roomy camp. On the opposite side and separated from the river by a mile of swamp was Camp Belknap, a spot fit only for the snakes, tarantulas, centipeds, fleas, scorpions and ants that infested it; and above this point lay several more camps, extending to Matamoros.²⁴

Except Belknap, all of the camps were fairly salubrious

May 24; June 3, 17, 24; July 1, 2, 25, 30; House Ex. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 301, 305, 307, 315, 320, 329, 405, 550. Id. to Buchanan, Aug. 29, 1847: Bixby's Taylor Letters, 173. Senate Ex. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 2 sess (Marcy, Report.)

²³ In Jan., 1847, Jesup estimated that a railroad from the Brazos Id. camp to the mouth of the river would already have saved at least \$500,000 (House Ex. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 571).

²⁴ Few troops were quartered at Matamoros, though there were many vacant houses (New Orleans *Picayune*, July 14).

for men of reasonable prudence, and several of them distinctly healthful; yet considerable sickness prevailed. At Brazos Island there was a sort of dysentery, and by many the water of the Rio Grande itself was thought injurious. Until the 13th of May no funds available for tents had been within the reach of Quartermaster General Jesup; and after this difficulty was removed, feeling that he could not wait for duck, he used common muslin, which let the rain through, and many of the troops—even regulars—had no protection at all against the weather except a screen of brush or a blanket thrown over a bush. Measles attacked the camps, and lying on the damp ground made the disease fatal in many instances. What was worse, the heedlessness and homesickness of the volunteers caused much sickness even at Point Isabel. The regulars, on the other hand, were comparatively healthy and contented.

The heat, softened by the constant breezes, was thought by many less oppressive than in Tennessee and Kentucky, but sometimes men fainted at the drills. Bathing was a valued resource, and on the seashore there were oysters, crabs and a large variety of beautiful fish to catch and eat. Stately processions of herons and flamingoes and the chatter of jack-daws and many other birds amused the soldiers; and some of those addicted to sport discussed the project of crossing the mosquitoes with gamecocks, we are told. The roar of the sea and the mirages along the Rio Grande, innumerable flowers, the solemn burros (donkeys) almost hidden by their loads, the Mexicans who sold eatables at exorbitant prices, the long lines of tents where such luxuries existed, target shooting, and now and then the muffled drum helped occupy one's attention. At sunset a tremulous orange haze in the west was due, followed by the twinkling lights of the camp, that were so agreeable to view from a distance; and then were in order the howling of wolves, the tenor chorus of the swamps, and the agonized baritone fugues of the donkeys. It was now time for singing, story-telling and, above all, gambling,—perhaps Old Sledge on a blanket, perhaps Chuckle-luck, perhaps Monte, perhaps Faro; and now and then came a fandango

on the hard ground with such American and Mexican women as there were. But the novelty of camp experience very soon wore off, and the volunteers grew discontented.²⁵

They had come for glory and a good time, and were having neither. They wanted to do something, and to do it at once, or go home. One of them declared that assignment to garrison duty would have led to general desertion. Wherever they were, they panted to be somewhere else. Having chosen to gamble, with their lives for a stake, they clamored to have the game begin. If there was no enemy to fight, they were ready to fight friends; and in one of the many brawls and riots Col. Baker was shot in the neck. Four or five months of training under expert officers and strict discipline were necessary to prepare regulars for the field;²⁶ and naturally these volunteers, almost wholly alien to the habits, feelings and efficiency of the real soldier, often felt at liberty to thwart and even defy their commander, and were unable to cooperate with him intelligently even when disposed to do so. In spite of positive orders they wasted ammunition recklessly, and Lieut. Meade thought a day passed in his tent not less perilous than a stiff battle.

The officers were very similar. One brigadier general came with a light buggy, in which he proposed to make the cam-

²⁵ The life of the camps: New Orleans *Picayune*, Apr. 7; May 30; June 14, 24; July 9, 26. Oran Perry, Indiana, etc., 84-5, 87, 97, 100-2. House Ex. Doc. 60; 30 Cong., 1 sess., 571 (Jesup), 697 (Thomas). A. G. Brackett, Lane's Brigade, 18, 22, 33. [Robertson], *Reminiscences of a Campaign*, June 23, 30; July 7, etc. [Luther Giddings], *Sketches of the Campaign*, 27, 36-40. *G. B. McClellan to sister, Oct. 8: McClellan papers, Library of Cong. *P. C. Neeld, Letter. W. B. to D. C. Campbell, July 11, 19, 29, 31; Aug. 9: *supra*. *S. F. Nunelee, Diary: belonging to James Howells Nunelee. *J. C. Henshaw, Narrative: Mass. Hist. Soc. *T. D. Tennery, Diary: *supra*. *J. C. Ewing, Diary. *Washington Union*, June 10; Aug. 3, 18; Sept. 1 (Letters). *W. B. Smith, Diary. Special Orders 71: House Ex. Doc. 60; 30 Cong., 1 sess., 528. S. C. Reid, *Scouting Expeditions*, 20. Isaac Smith, *Reminiscences*, 9, 25, 34. *Matamoros News*, July 8. *Niles' Register*, July 4, 288; Sept. 12, pp. 21, 22. (Funds) Jesup, Dec. 5: House Ex. Doc. 60; 30 Cong., 1 sess., 559. Taylor, Aug. 29, 1847: Bixby's Taylor Letters, 173. Gen. James Shields, Aug. 28: War. Dept., Adj. Gen's. files. *Carlin to Polk, May 19: War Dept., Sec. War files. W. S. Henry, Campaign Sketches, 121. *National Intelligencer*, Aug. 3. John Sedgwick, Correspondence, i, 4. B. P. Tilden, Notes, 17, 22. *Cushing to Pierce, May 4, 1847: Pierce papers, Library of Cong. W. W. Bishop, Journal.

²⁶ In the New York *Sun*, Dec. 12, 1915, Maj. Wm. Wallace showed why time is needed to make a soldier.

paign. Another brigadier general had enlisted as a private, and, not being deemed worthy to command the company, had been elected a lieutenant; but the executive fiat provided him with qualifications. "In the name of God," wrote a soldier to Senator Allen, "don't let Hamer be made a brigadier general: he is talented but doesn't dare undertake to drill a squad;" yet the commission was issued.²⁷ Pillow, another of the same rank, ambitious to figure and ignorant of his duties, did what he should not have done. Some of the volunteer generals on horseback reminded Lieut. Jamieson of the line, "Woe to the mullein-stalk that came in our way."

Persons of a mature age, who had bulked large in peace, would not stoop to plod through the rudiments of a new profession. Even good officers were in fear of the letters written home by their men and of the revenge that might be taken later should real discipline be enforced; while those less conscientious threatened to resign if kept in the background, stood in the way of a superior belonging to the opposite political party, in order to prevent him from making a reputation, or even took part with the men in the hope of getting into Congress by and by. In short, the volunteers were all one costly mass of ignorance, confusion and insubordination, said Meade; while the regular officers were discouraged, not merely by discovering that civilians were preferred to educated soldiers for high appointments, but by finding themselves in the shadow, and even under the command, of men who had been discharged from West Point for incapacity or from the army for gross misconduct.²⁸

At the height of this disorder, Gen. Taylor, who was disqualified by his lack of experience and mental discipline for organizing an efficient staff and therefore needed to use his own eyes and his own voice, held aloof. "I very seldom

²⁷ Hamer was, however, a man of sound judgment and firm will, and proved very useful to the volunteers. This fact illustrates the good side of the system.

²⁸ Lieut. W. W. Mackall wrote with reference to this matter, "I am determined, with God's aid, to do my duty cheerfully and show no sign of impatience." The letters and diaries of Robert Anderson and others give us reason to believe that such a spirit was not uncommon among the regular officers.

leave my tent," he wrote on the 25th of July, adding helplessly, "How it will all end time alone must determine;" and finally the politicians, eager for any leverage on votes and offices, felt that perhaps the victor of Palo Alto might be useful to them, and occupied his time and attention with correspondence about the Presidency.²⁹ The summer passed without results, and the three-months men went home disgusted after all.

Said an American officer, "Well may we be grateful that we are at war with Mexico! Were it any other power, our gross follies would have been punished severely." The author of this remark was not an orator; but later he won the battle of Gettysburg, and this language is not without eloquence of a certain kind.³⁰

JUSTIN H. SMITH.

²⁹ Morale of the army: Taylor, June 3; July 7, 25; Aug. 19: Bixby's Taylor Letters. *Ewing, Diary, Aug. 17; Sept. 7. "His Comrades," 22. Meade, Letters, i, 91, 102-3, 110, 115-6, etc. (Brawls, etc.) Tilden, Notes, 17; Henry, Campaign Sketches, 124, 128, 137; *Smith, Diary, Aug. 13; *Ewing, Diary, Sept. 7; *Niles' Register*, July 25, 326; Sept. 5, 1; Sept. 19, 40. (Months) *Bankhead, Apr. 7: War Dept., Adj. Gen's files. St. Louis *Republican*, Aug. 5. *Vedette*, ix, No. 1 (Officer, Aug. 22). *Wall to Allen, July 2: Wm. Allen papers, Library of Cong. Wilhelm, Eighth Infantry, 425. W. B. to D. C. Campbell, July 3, Aug. 9, 28; Nov. 9; Dec. 7: *supra*. *S. E. Chamberlain, Recollections. *Bliss to Hitchcock, July 23: Hitchcock papers, Library of Cong. *Mackall to father: Mackall papers, belonging to the family.

³⁰ Meade, Letters, i, 152.





